

California Lutheran

UNIVERSITY

14 April 2015

Instructional Quality Commission
California State Board of Education
1430 N Street, Suite #5111
Sacramento, CA 95814

Respected Members of the Commission,

Please accept my gratitude as you try to ensure fairness and educational integrity in this complex process of working through the History-Social Sciences framework. I am also grateful for the opportunity to present my perspective to you as a tenured professor of Religion, as a Campus Interfaith Strategist, and as a Sikh-American.

My positions at California Lutheran University, a comprehensive regional institution built around a small liberal arts college, have taught me how important it is to understand the struggles of individual communities as well as their achievements. It is essential that students not base their perceptions about religions solely through media representations, stereotypes, or through trodden but incorrect past portrayals.

Moreover, it is essential that students learn about communities' struggles for self-representation in the public sphere, and do so by examining the communities on their own terms. Minority communities, as you know, struggle to ensure that this happens. Sikhs are not only a minority in their own lands of origin, but even more so in the context of the United States. And yet they have contributed well beyond their numbers to the cultures where they have gone, and deserve to be known on their own terms.

The Interfaith Youth Core, a national organization working towards religious pluralism on American college campuses, holds that true religious pluralism demands a respect for our diverse identities (<http://ifyc.org/about>). We cannot create a truly pluralistic society if we deny communities the right to be identified.

Learning about diverse communities in a school environment is instrumental in shaping young minds' perceptions about minority communities and religions. This is why it is essential to Sikh-Americans and Sikhs world wide that the History-Social Sciences framework retain the word "Sikh" instead of "South Asian" as has been suggested. This is also why Guru Nanak should be left in the Framework as a social reformer.

You have heard from other scholars

- that Sikhism is an independent religious tradition and that Sikhs are a sovereign people,
- about the special importance of Sikhs in California's history,
- and the history of Sikhs as a distinct century-old American community.

In particular, Professor Pashaura Singh's letter (UC-Riverside) rightly connects the current effort with the HSS to Governor Brown's promise of promoting greater understanding of Sikhs. It is essential to educating California students appropriately that Sikh religious identity is kept whole and that Sikhs-Americans receive the dignity that their heritage deserves.

You know that Sikh groups have worked hard in other states like New Jersey, Texas, and New York to have Sikhs represented in social studies curricula. They have also worked hard to form relationships with textbook publishers to educate them about these issues. Sikhs in America are extremely concerned, as they should be, about how their community's history and achievements are taught in the public school system.

I respectfully and passionately implore you to leave the references to Sikhs and Sikh history intact, and to thereby portray Sikhs accurately in the HSS.

Sincerely,

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